Investigating Students' Critical Reading:
Critical Literacy in EFL Setting

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Abstract

This study, aimed at investigating the EFL university students' critical reading from the perspective of critical literacy, was conducted in one of Indonesian state universities. There were 12 EFL college students participating in the study. The students' written and verbal responses were analysed on the basis of content analysis. The findings reveal the students' critical stance in their ability to bring meaning to the text by reconstructing and deconstructing the text, and a combination of both. The language acts used to show their critical stance were negating, comparing, and confirming the values promoted in the text.

1 Introduction

While English literacy programme as first or second language has been directed towards achieving critical literacy (e.g. Comber & Nixon, 2011; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2011; Wohlwend & Lewis, 2011), the main objective of the reading activities in EFL programmes still focuses on understanding the content of reading texts. Cox & Assis-Peterson (1999) speculated that the teaching of reading in EFL programme is to serve a pragmatic objective, instrumental reading. This seems to be the reason that studies on EFL are mostly focused on cognitive activities, such as words decoding (e.g. Farley & Elmore, 1992; Guo, Roehrig, & Williams, 2011; Lo, 2011; Zhang, & Anual, 2008).

As access to diverse media is readily available today, learners of EFL should be equipped with the ability to critically question the information of a text. The definition of reading comprehension in EFL should be reconsidered to cover the ability to always question critically the purpose, the message, and the value or ideology being promoted. Such a definition will require the learner to be able to link the information the text conveys with values beyond. Thus, through the EFL reading activities, the learners should be able to increase their awareness that a text may contest their own value and that they have to be able to convey their voices. This should be part of the activities of critical reading in EFL. Redefining the meaning of critical reading has been proposed by EFL experts. In EFL, critical reading is analogically similar to critical thinking. Beaumont (2010) argued that critical thinking in reading is not only about comprehending a text but also about acting. The ability to take decisions about a particular issue a text promotes is the 'acting' part of reading. This

'acting' is informed by the activity of interpreting through analysing, evaluating, and synthesising information.

Benesch (1993), on the other hand, argued that inferencing, including the activities of analysing, synthesising, and evaluating, is not critical thinking but part of cognitive activities. They are around-the-text-centred activities such as pulling the information from the text. Critical thinking, according to Benesch, is connecting a text with the reader's experience and its relationship to "language, politics, and history" (1993, p. 546) of the new context. Critical in this context requires the reader to link their own values with the culture the text promotes. Further, Alford (2001) supports such an idea of critical thinking in EFL reading by proposing the activity of interrogating the text's ideological position and investigating how the ideology influences the reader. Enright (2010) asserted that the teaching of EFL reading to increase academic literacy should integrate the linguistic, social, politics, and cultural aspects of language. Integrating these aspects will likely enhance the students' ability to make meaning from texts by linking the social, political, and cultural aspects of the text with their own. Cox & Assis-Peterson (1999) asserted in their study that language is never neutral and that teaching is a political act. They eventually suggested that EFL programmes should be able to empower those excluded from the English-speaking community. This can be achieved through critical EFL reading activities.

Despite the different standpoints about critical reading, the teaching of critical reading is constrained by the critical view of some EFL practitioners who assume EFL students have a low capacity to be critical (Macknish, 2011) or even uncritical at all (Buckingham, 1992). In the Indonesian context, Hayati (2010) voiced similar concerns. She stated that EFL teachers trying to apply critical pedagogy might face a challenge in terms of Indonesian students being unfamiliar with problematizing things and questioning assumptions. For the purpose of investigating EFL student's critical reading and challenging the assumption and concern above, our study was conducted to find out (1) which values promoted by the text are criticised by students and, (2) how they criticised them.

2   Review of the literature

A relatively complete picture of teaching EFL reading in Indonesia is offered by a review done by Cahyono and Widiati (2006). In their review, they found that the teaching of EFL reading in Indonesia is dominated by intensive reading for the purpose of achieving reading comprehension by focusing on text decoding, the use of schemata, and various teaching strategies. The results of the review are convergent with other studies focusing on EFL reading for Indonesian university students conducted in the second half of the decade of 2000. To mention but a few, a study by Sulistyo and Suharmanto (2007) found some variables influencing students' reading comprehension, namely, knowledge of linguistics, reading strategies, and text structure. Another study by Floris and Divina (2009) emphasised the importance of background knowledge and various required reading skills to comprehend certain level of text difficulty. Unfortunately, reading activities to promote students' critical literacy are not as yet common in Indonesian EFL teaching.

This can be traced back to the curriculum of ELT programmes in Indonesia which only focuses in reading on interrogating the text without extending the interpretation beyond the text. This was confirmed by Kirkpatrick (2007). He found that the goal of EFL reading in the college curriculum in Indonesia seemed to be very instrumental: to simply understand the information of a text. This seems to justify the claim made by Cox and Assis-Peterson (1999) that EFL programmes tend to serve pragmatic purposes. This claim is strengthened by Cahyono and Widiati (2006) who concluded in their review that the focus of EFL teaching at the university level is to enable students to comprehend expository texts, which are commonly used in textbooks. In other words, it seems that critical thinking in its implementation in the classroom is limited to the activities of harvesting information from the text through the activities of identifying, comparing, analysing, evaluating, and creating information. In the latest curriculum, it is stated that the college students should be able to reach the epistemic level of reading (Putra, 2014), which requires students to be creative, explora-

tive, and critical. Unfortunately, Putra did not discuss whether there is a specific operational definition about the epistemic level of reading. We suspect that, despite what the document states, the methods and techniques of teaching EFL reading do not change. Indonesian EFL teachers, we argue, are not familiar with defining critical reading as it is informed by the critical paradigm. This is proven by the scarcity, if none at all, of literature on use of critical paradigm in EFL programme in Indonesia.

Despite the objective of teaching EFL reading at the college level, we suspect that the definition of critical thinking adopted by the EFL curriculum does not change to suit with the new knowledge and learning paradigm. It seems cognitivism still dominates the definition of critical thinking rather than the critical (literacy) paradigm.

3   Critical reading in EFL: An element of critical literacy

For most EFL reading instructions, critical reading always means critical thinking. Critical thinking includes the activity of interrogating a text through higher order cognitive activities such as: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, from which the subskill of inferencing is constructed (Benesch, 1993). Atkinson (1997) argues that critical thinking is within the realm of social practice. As a social practice, critical thinking is the inseparable daily act of community members in reading their world. Critical thinking is closely associated with literacy, the activity of reading plus writing. Its definition refers to the way of thinking of a particular group of community, especially those communities with well-established written cultural practices (Collins & Blot, 2003). Such a definition of critical thinking is claimed to give exclusion to a particular group of community which is familiar to such higher order thinking (Iyer, 2007); such a particular group of community, thus, claims to be more superior than other communities (Collins & Blot, 2003). Other groups of communities with oral practices are considered not familiar with critical thinking involving higher order cognitive activities.

This writing does not have the intention siding with the claim or opposing it. However, as Davidson (1998) proposed in relation to the definition of critical thinking, we try to define clearly what definition of critical thinking works for EFL reading activities which may become their "rational judgemental" practices out of the EFL classroom. By embarking from the pedagogical approach of critical literacy that focuses on building students' understanding of the political and ideological roles of a language (Iwasaki & Kumagai, 2008), we argue that EFL students should remain skeptical to any information they read by analysing and evaluating information from the text and at the same time confronting the information in the text from the perspective of power and ideology. Therefore, this current study adopts a definition of critical reading informed by critical literacy as the activity of textual inferencing of information and interpreting the information by connecting it to power, ideology, and the reader's own values. Reading activities supported by this definition will enable the students to (1) promote reflection and transformation of knowledge, (2) learn to listen to and sound out their voices, (3) appreciate multiple perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2011).

Empirically, study on critical reading from the perspective of critical literacy is still less explored in EFL. Only few studies in relation to the implementation of critical literacy approach in EFL are identified. A relevant study dealing with critical reading for EFL college students was conducted by Park (2011). The study focused on the implementation of critical literacy teaching in the Korean EFL classroom by a number of different activities such as critically reading English news articles, peer interaction, and writing response papers. The finding shows that students' critical literacy was facilitated by the evaluation of critical incidents by using qualifying expressions; interlinking "cultural and personal experiences or anecdotes" to justify their arguments (Park, 2011, pp. 39–40).

Another study on critical reading was conducted by Macknish (2011) focusing on Chinese EFL students in a Singaporean university setting who had never been taught critical reading. The study found that the students, given some authentic English texts and facilitated with peer discussion, were able to uncover hidden messages as a critical literacy-related process. Macknish proved that, through a constructed process of instruction, EFL students can develop their criticality by relating their critical thinking with the text's ideology and interest without the target language necessarily being a

hindrance. The last study on critical reading was conducted by Ko (2013), involving an instructor and EFL college students in reading classroom. The focus of the study was on how the teacher directed students to practice critical literacy in an EFL classroom. By using various teaching materials, the study showed interesting finding dealing with the technique the instructor used to facilitate critical dialogues with the student. The technique involved (1) inviting student's individual critical stance on a topic of a text, (2) guiding the student to deconstruct a text, and (3) encouraging them to reconstruct a particular socio-political issue.

Having reviewed the studies above, we conclude that studies on critical reading in EFL setting were focused on classroom instruction dealing with either students' critical reading activity or the teacher's technique in eliciting the student's criticality within the frame of critical paradigm. Our study, on the other hand, was intended to fill in the gap by focusing on students' responses when they are required to criticise a text containing a particular Indonesian ethnic socio-cultural value beyond the setting of the classroom instruction, in a form of independent reading activity. We expected students' responses would be varied as a result of meaning negotiation between the text and the students' background knowledge. We also emphasise in this study that the reading activity required the student to experience a process of challenging commonly accepted beliefs, values, or assumptions as representations of interest of a particular group or society promoted in the text.

4   Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative research design. Details about participant selection, data collection and analysis are discussed in the following.

4.1   Participants of the study

The participants of the study were chosen on the basis of purposive sampling. They were intentionally selected as the researcher considered that they would be able to provide data to answer the research questions. Twelve students, enrolled at a state university in Indonesia, were recruited as research participants of the current study. The participants were EFL university students in their second year and majoring in English Letters. They were from various Indonesian ethnic communities, namely, those of Manado, Java, Bali, and Flores, and Malays. Their main language is Indonesian and some of them, especially those from Java, speak Javanese as their mother tongue. The students have been exposed to reading comprehension activities from the first year of their university studies. The reading activities are directed to achieve the purpose of pulling information from the text. The main purpose is to understand what a text is about. We argue that the students, to a particular degree, do not have problems with understanding a text involving cognitive activities, such as identifying, analysing, evaluating, and synthesising information. The activity of bringing meaning to the text, which is what critical literacy seeks to achieve, is however not yet part of the activities.

Before the study was started, the students were informed by the teacher who provided the author access to conduct the study in her class that the reading activity was not part of the teaching. The students were therefore free to decide if they wanted to join the study. Instead of giving the students written informed consent forms, we considered that those who worked out and returned the reading task agreed to join the study (Dornyei, 2007). Those who chose not to participate did not need to hand in the task. This would prevent the students from losing face or feeling guilty. The reading material selected for this study was a short story involving the socio-cultural values of Minang, an Indonesian ethnic group. The text is thematically about the preservation of traditions on the one hand and the struggle to maintain individual rights on the other. The use of such a short story would require the students to feel the sort of life being promoted and sense particular values being confronted. We expected that this, in turn, would stimulate them to connect the text with their own different socio-cultural values and personal experiences, which may facilitate their critical thinking

(Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). The English version of the story is available online and translated by a native speaker of English.

4.2   Data collection

Data in the form of the participants' written responses were collected by delivering reading comprehension tasks consisting of a reading material and a set of questions. The task was given to the participants by the teacher between class activities after a short introduction about the task. The teacher informed the students that the task was not part of the teaching. The reading material for the study was delivered to the class in meeting 5. The participants were asked to read the story thoroughly after the class. They were allowed to bring the text home as an independent reading activity and to work out the questions about the text at home. They were required to give written responses based on the questions which helped them elicit meaning from the text and make critical connections with their own socio-cultural background as a way of making new interpretive meanings of the text.

The questions on the text were divided into two major parts. The first part comprised 2 questions (items 1 and 2) requiring the students to understand what information the text contains. They require the participants to understand the flow of the story. The second one comprised 2 more questions (items 3 and 4) requiring the students to be critical towards the values promoted in the text and and to connect the text with related matters beyond the text, including the participants' own experiences. Only the latter two questions are discussed in this article.

As a matter of fact, the focus of the reading activity was not teaching; there was no interaction between the teacher and the students during and after the reading activity was done. The focus was instead on how individual students interacted with and made meaning from the socio-culturally related reading material. We argue that the students, with their experience in EFL reading comprehension of pulling out meaning from a text, would have no difficulty in understanding the text. To be able to criticise a text, a reading activity they had never before done, we provided a reading text with questions which would guide them in linking the text with their own life experiences. They were just required to carry out reading activity which was different from the activities they were used to. They were required to be critical by connecting what the text presented with their own social values and personal experiences. Therefore, there was no initial activity set for students prior to the administration of the reading task.

Eventually, 12 students handed in their written responses within the following 2 days, the due date. Soon after the written responses were collected and analysed, a follow-up interview was conducted to collect more comprehensive data on the process of critical reading.

4.3   Data analysis

There were two types of data. They were data collected from the reading text in the form of written replies and recorded data from the interviews. The data from the written answers were analysed to answer the research question dealing with values the participants criticised. After the process of transcribing the interview data, analyses were carried out by identifying how the participants challenged values promoted by the text, which would show the participants' critical stance. The participants' critical stance was analyzed based on the characteristics of critical pedagogy involving two processes. They are the process of developing self-awareness and the process of transcending boundary of the self to social praxis. The process of developing self-awareness starts within the self in the form of critical reflection, dissenting opinions, and different standpoints. Transcending the boundary of the self to social praxis deals with critical action initiated by dialogue, empowerment, and action to challenge the oppression (Phillips & Guilherme, 2004). Thus, the two types of processes above, combined, involve (1) critical reflection, (2) dissent, (3) difference, (4) dialogue, (5) empowerment, and (6) action. These six concepts were used as the bases of analysing students' critical stances while critically analysing the given text in this study.

5   Findings

The following subsections are focused on exploring the participants' responses to the last 2 questions (item number 3 and 4) on the short story, namely:

3.   How do you relate the situation faced by the main character in the story to your own cultural background? Provide a clear example of your or other's experiences.
4.   How would you criticise the idea that 'being a married woman is the end goal of a successful woman' in relation to your own values?

The followings are findings dealing with the students' critical responses, especially values in the text the students criticise and how they challenge the values.

5.1   Values the students challenge

Data from the written responses showed that various themes were identified. The themes that emerged are: arranged marriage; women's rights; education pursuit; achievement of both housewife and career; and redefining success for a woman. In relation to the custom of arranged marriage the text promotes, all the participants disagreed and argued that the value of arranged marriage is irrelevant in the present time. Most participants felt that education is more important than marriage and rejected the notion that marriage and raising a family are the end goals of life. Some voiced the view that marriage is important, but argued that wives can pursue a professional carrier while at the same time raising a family (i.e. taking care of children and a husband). Table 1 depicts the emerging themes and the participants' critical stance.

Table 1. Themes and critical stance

Themes emerging	Stances	
	Text stance	Critical Stance
Arranged marriage	Supported	Rejected
Women's rights in terms of:		
- being a housewife	A must	Conditional yes
- education pursuit	No	A must
Professional career	No	A must
The meaning of success for a woman	To get married, raise a family, and serve a husband	To have good education, good professional carrier, then to get married

They all seemed to agree that to get married is human nature. What they challenged was the idea that women, after getting married, should stay at home nurturing their children. They also challenged the value of being a housewife with her limited duties: working around the house. In the following, we will discuss in detail the analysis of data about the participants' critical stances based on the two major characteristics of critical literacy, namely, intrinsic self-awareness and transcendental action beyond the self.

5.1.1   Intrinsic self-awareness

This self-awareness – taking place within the self – consists of three different points: critical reflection, dissent, and difference. All these three points emerged and are discussed in detail below.

• Critical reflection

As the participants were prompted to answer questions relating to what they have socially and culturally experienced with what had been experienced by the main character in their reading, their written responses were culturally-bound. They were able to produce elaborate responses explaining

how they viewed 'arranged marriage' based on their socio-cultural values and practices as shown in the following Transcript 1.

Transcript 1: Critical reflection

Interviewer: How do you relate the situation faced by the main character in the story to your own cultural background? Provide a clear example of your or other's experiences.

Participant 08: For me this is not the era when parents look for a couple for their daughter. In my culture a woman also [gets] right to seeking knowledge as high as they can. Although, a woman [doesn't] have to work, they must try to [live] by [themselves] not dependant to men.

Participant 08 tried to relate the topic of arranged marriage with her own social experiences. She, as a result of her reflection on her own lived experiences, argued that a woman has the right to decide her own life path. She reflected critically based on her own lived experiences by saying that a woman has the right to pursue her own education, just like what she has been doing. Yet, she also stated that a woman does not always work for a living. This point, which she might have experienced with her own mother or other women in her family circle, seems to be invoked from a particular local life value saying that being a breadwinner is a man's business.

• *Dissent*

Transcript 2 shows that participant 03 had a dissenting opinion about what is considered a social norm in the story. The social norm concerned the arranged marriage in Minang culture. She disagreed with the norm, as it required a concurrent agreement between a woman and a man to have their marriage arranged as soon as they were considered mature. However, in the text, marriage was seen as something holy and an obligation to maintain the existence of (Minang) society. Therefore, the text views arranged marriage as a social and cultural duty that must be fulfilled over individual rights to self-determination, such as pursuing higher education (especially for females).

Transcript 2: Dissenting opinion about common accepted truth

Interviewer: How would you criticise the issue [in the story about arranged marriage] in relation to your own values?

Participant 03: I disagree with the statement. The goal of life isn't just [to] be [a] married person, but you must have good attitude, good education, many experiences and so many things else. You will be the first teacher for your children, so you must have knowledge. And knowledge is useful in everything. You must improve your life and be better than your generation before.

Participant 03's disagreement was supported by the argument against the idea that a woman does not need to pursue higher education. It was deemed sufficient for a woman to be able to read and write simple matters. She further argued that even a mother has to have good knowledge to become a good mother. She eventually extended the role of a married woman from simply being a mother into a mother who is also a knowledgeable teacher for her children.

• *Difference*

Being aware that a particular society has its own way of life is important to raise the sense of mutual understanding. This mutual understanding is important to eliminate negative judgement over other's way of life as a result of having only one single perspective to understand the world. Negative judgement brewed with political interest might result in oppression. The response of participant 10 in Transcript 3 shows that she was aware that her society has its own norms about marriage. She understood that arranged marriage is not a custom of the society to which she belongs. Instead, she opined that marriage is ruled by a dowry a prospective husband has to give his parents-in-law. She described the consequence of being an educated woman from the perspective of her own customs.

Transcript 3: Being different from others

Interviewer: How do you relate the situation faced by the main character in the story to your own cultural background? Provide a clear example of your or other's experiences.

Participant 10: In my own culture, a man [wants] to marry his girl should give belis, 'dowry', to her family. And the higher her academic title, the [higher] the dowry he should give. There is one story; a man couldn't marry his girlfriend, because his girlfriend has a college degree while he is only high-school graduated. Her parents ask 20 horses as dowry he should give. The man doesn't have enough money to buy horses. Of course the girl's parents can't accept his proposal. In the end, this couple can't get married.

Belis-ruled marriage was used by the participant to show that arranged marriage exists in different forms. In this context, this *belis*-ruled marriage takes place in the participant's place of birth, Flores, the eastern Indonesia. The difference highlights various customary rules concerning the practice of marriage among different ethnic groups in Indonesia.

5.1.2   Action beyond the self

Criticisms about a particular value should be voiced so that other people can hear or pay attention to them. To enable people to hear the critical voices, each of the three points should be acted out, namely, dialogue, empowerment, and action. All three points emerged in the data and are addressed in the following discussion.

• *Dialogue*

What is important in multicultural life is dialogue among people with different socio-cultural practices. Dialogue is important to bridge the possible gaps in life activities informed by particular social norms and values. Differences, accordingly, should entail dialogue. Participant 09 elaborated her critical stance by arguing that the success in pursuing life does not always end up with a person getting married.

Transcript 4: Dialogue among multi-cultural practices

Interviewer: How would you criticise the issue [in the story about arranged marriage] in relation to your own values?

Participant 09: I think [success] will never end as long as someone [is still] alive and [has] a dream. There is no relation between marriage and [success]. Actually there is nothing wrong with arranged marriages, but [pushing] someone to marry somebody they never know before is not a good thing, too.

At least, she rejected intermixing the notions of success and marriage defined in the story. The participant thought critically that there was no relation between an individual success and status of being a married woman. Her objection towards a condition when a woman was pushed to get married would eventually raise a conflict of which resolution could only be reached through a dialogue. Yet, dialogue in this context is still a potential action.

• *Empowerment*

Critical reflection, dissent, and difference trigger empowerment and this empowerment is facilitated by dialogue. The experiences gained through dialogue empower the participants in the form of new insights of or strengthened values and norms. This is articulated in Transcript 5.

Transcript 5: Social empowerment

Question 03: How do you relate the situation faced by the main character in the story to your own cultural background? Provide a clear example of your or other's experiences.

Participant 12: In my culture my parents give me emancipation for my live. But, they always give me the best advice, such as when I decided [to] continue my study in Malang.

The response from participant 12 in Transcript 5 acknowledged that everyone has the right to pursue his or her individual educational goal. His response also showed his opinion that education was important for him. This was proven by the fact that he has moved from his own birth town, Samarinda, Kalimantan, to Malang, Java, because he wanted to pursue his undergraduate programme. He further added that in the process of deciding where to go for his college education, the role his parents assumed was only to give him suggestions. In the end, he himself eventually decided his own future. Transcript 5 also shows that individual empowerment through education was not accompanied by the power enactment of parents to plan an arranged marriage for their child, which was different from the story.

• **Action**

Participant 10 in Transcript 6 revealed her position towards the practice of arranged marriage. She did not only reject the practice, but also argued that it may have a negative psychological impact on the married couple. She was even ready to accept the social consequence of her rejection of the practice. At the end, she emphasized the importance of taking action to fight against the practice.

> **Transcript 6: Critical verbal action**
>
> Interviewer: How would you criticise the issue [in the story about arranged marriage] in relation to your own values?
> Participant 10: … Marrying someone who we do not love is [hurtful]. Sometimes people also get depressed because they can't marry their true love … I think there is no need to be ashamed [of] marrying our true love even [if] it can make our position down. We only live once, no matter what happens, we have to fight for [whom] we love.

The power of language lies in its capacity to convey meanings. Meanings are not value-free but are controlled by power which determines what a particular signifier means in a particular time and space. Language can move people in a direction that the speaker wants. In other words, language has its own way to rule the life of the speakers by creating and maintaining people's affairs (Elgin, 2000). In this context, participant 10 has used the power of language to move her young counterparts to alleviate humans' suffering from oppression (Kincheloe, 2008).

5.2   Students' criticisms of the values

This part will discuss how students challenged values in the text and promoted their own values. The data show that students challenged the values in the text by strengthening a particular value (reconstruction), opposing partially a particular value while still adopting the challenged value (deconstruction), and by both reconstructing and deconstructing that particular value.

5.2.1   Reconstructing a particular value

In challenging the value in the text, arranged marriage, one student criticised the custom of arranged marriage by rejecting the notion that it is the only end goal of life, as shown in Transcript 2: "…but you must have good attitude, good education, many experiences … be the first teacher for your children, … improve your life and be better than your generation before." In this context, the value of a mother was reconstructed from being a housewife and a mother into a mother as a knowledgeable teacher for achieving what the participant 03 considered as the goal of her society: to produce a better future generation. This also shows that participant 03 viewed society to be dynamic and not static. A dynamic society can only be achieved through education. It is different from the commonly accepted view of society in the text, which was to preserve what has socially become a tradition. It is from this dissenting opinion that the awareness of the need for females to pursue further education emerged. The awareness placed a female in the same position as a male to establish a better life than for the previous generation.

5.2.2   Deconstructing a particular value

Another way of challenging the custom of arranged marriage promoted in the text is by compromising on the value of arranged marriage and yet at the same time negating it. This can be seen from Transcript 4 in which participant 09 says: "Actually there is nothing wrong with arranged marriages, but [pushing] someone to marry somebody they never know before is not a good thing, too." Participant 09 seems to accept the practice of arranged marriage, because she was of the opinion that there is nothing wrong when parents suggest good persons to their children as marriage partners. On the other hand, she negated her own idea by arguing that it is harmful to push someone to get married with a person whom she or he has never met before. Deconstruction of a particular value as shown by the attempt of the participant to compromise on and oppose the practice of arranged marriage in the text is visible in her response. The deconstruction implies that arranged marriage, in the participant's point of view, is still acceptable only if the notion of 'arranged' means that parents are providing suggestion or advice concerning good choices as future spouses, but are leaving the decision to get married in the hands of their children.

5.2.3   Reconstructing and deconstructing values

Critical stance is also shown by combining both a way of strengthening a particular value to oppose the value in the text and compromising on a particular value promoted in the text. This can be seen from Transcript 1. Participant 08 says, "… In my culture a woman also [gets] right to seek knowledge as high as they can. Although, a woman [doesn't] have to work, they must try to [live] by [themselves] not dependant to men." Her response shows that she rejected the custom of arranged marriage and strengthened the value of being a woman by asserting that a female has the right to education. She asserted that a woman has the right to pursue higher education, as to as high a level as possible, which is a form of reconstructing the position of the female. Yet, at the same time, deconstruction takes place when she was accepting a compromise on the position in the text while also strengthening the position of being independent from a man. She accepted a compromise when she apparently agreed that a woman may not work for a living.

6   Discussion

The power of language lies in its capacity to hide a particular agenda. Uncovering the hidden message a language conveys in a text is the major point of critical literacy reading. Hidden messages are very often disguised in a transcendental signified or taken-for-granted-expression (Janks, 2012). The students in this study show their critical stances towards the value promoted by the text in three language actions: negating the values the language promotes, comparing, and confirming the values. The students rejected values promoted by the text. It is evident in their negation of the idea of preserving traditions. The students expressed a strong 'no' to show their position towards the text. They refused to acknowledge such values, as they believe the values will only limit their independence in deciding their own future. Negating is one of the ways they have to give their world identity (Janks, 2012).

Besides negating the values the text promotes, the students also show their criticality by comparing the values promoted by the text and their own values. In seeing the text more clearly, the students compare one of the values in the text, arranged marriage, with another case of marriage they know in their society. One compares the marriage with the custom of providing a dowry and another compares it with caste-based marriage. The expression "In my own culture, a man [wants] to marry his girl should give *belis*, 'dowry', to her family …" (participant 10) shows how one student compares a particular tradition in her society with that in the text. This act of comparison shows the students' effort to respect diversity. By doing so, false judgement about other people's way of thinking and life can be avoided. Very often, this false judgement is the beginning of oppression for a

particular group of community. Understanding others, we argue, is one of the cores of critical reading literacy.

The last language action used by the students to show their critical stance is confirming, in this case, the value they hold as a result of learning from their surroundings and that, to a particular degree, matches the value of the text. One of the traditions informed by the text is to respect old people, especially, to listen to and obey their commands. This tradition is shown in a confirmative expression "…my parents give me emancipation for my live. But, they always give me the best advice…" (participant 12) The act of listening to parents as old people is confirmed, yet under the condition that the decision remains with participant 12. This shows that the students were not in doubt being different in one way or another from the text. The text requires the readers to listen to and obey what old people command them to do. Participant 12 accepts listening to his parents but he wants to be able to decide. Seeing a particular issue from different angles leads to different results. This requires criticality to adopt the most suitable option for the readers based on their own social affordance, and not based on what others promote. The critical stance the student shows is an act of appreciating multiple perspectives, both the text's perspective and his own.

7 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students, in criticising the text given, were facilitated by two values. The first value deals with their own lived experiences based on socio-cultural values (e.g. the need to get married, duty to raise children) while the second is insight about values universally adhered to by human beings (e.g. women's rights and the right to education). The students were also able to negotiate the meaning in the text by reconstructing their own values, or by compromising on a particular value (deconstruction), or by both strengthening a particular value and yet at the same time compromising on another value. These processes – reconstruction, deconstruction, or both – show that there is a struggle within in a process of championing a particular value a student has and the value the text promotes. Finally, the students' critical stance is shown in three language acts, namely, negating, comparing, and confirming the values promoted in the text. Negating promoted values shown in a strong 'no' is a means of voicing out their critical stance. Comparing the values in the text with their own values shows the effort of accepting diversity to avoid false judgements, from which oppression originates. And confirming values in the text with their own values is a way of appreciating multiple perspectives. A way of giving themselves the identity that being different is natural.

8 Pedagogical implications

This study shows that critical reading from the perspective of critical literacy has much potential in EFL reading worth investing effort in. This is the time to bring EFL critical reading literacy to the horizon. Instead of being constrained by the view that the students are not ready or unfamiliar with critical thinking, the EFL reading teacher may start introducing critical literacy in EFL reading classes. As a start, a short story can be used or the material can be freely selected by the students according to their own interests. If the text selected based on their own interests, the students will be keen to learn and to engage in critical reading, which will eventually facilitate their critical reading activity.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1

From Gemstone to Jewel: The Synopsis

The story begins with a description of the journey the narrator has to take from a place called *Tambangan* to a village of *Jao*. The journey was not only hard because of the distance, but also because of the route she had to go through to be back to her hometown. In the beginning of the journey, she explained how difficult for her to cope with the situation where women were treated as objects of pleasures by the drivers, ticket collectors, and all men working on *Tambangan-Jao* route. The narrator's point of view of how those men treated woman passengers signified her stance of woman position in her society.

As the narrator arrives in *Jao*, she thought that no much had changed at the village. She had left the place for six years when she received a scholarship to study in Germany. At that time, her family was deemed as the enemy of the society by the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders is a non-department institution in the Land of the Minang. Using the metaphor of a nation, the village elders are the People's Consultative Council with the highest authority. Whatever they decide cannot be changed. The Council had obliged her father to step down from his position as village head because she chose to study in Germany instead of getting married to a son of Sutan Nagari who had proposed to her beforehand. The father excused to the Council that his daughter would get married as soon as she finished her study overseas.

Six years after turning down the arranged marriage with the son of Sutan Nagari, the narrator has to face another arranged marriage that has been settled by the Council of Elders. They had decided that if the family would like to stay living in *Jao*, she has to marry the son of the current village head. What made her mind the decision was the arranged marriage that obliged her to marry someone she did not even know. The proposal had been previously settled by both sides of parents with the endorsement of the Council of Elders. The narrator had an argument with her parents because she was forced to marry someone without her consent. Her father explained to her that he had done something to let her achieve what she wanted six years ago and now the time for her to do the same thing for her parents.

In her wedding day, her mother came to tell her that the arranged marriage she and her father had decided was not to please the Council of Elders. She was proud to have a daughter who has a excellent education and good job. However, to be a real jewel in the Land of Minang, a woman has to get married. Her mother reminded her that even though her daughter had lived in societies with very different cultures from her own, she wanted to make sure that there was one more stage that her daughter had to go through in the process of becoming a real Minang jewel, which was getting married.

One thing the narrator learns from the path of life she has to be through is that no matter how good her education was, no matter the size of her salary, she was still of Minang root. She had to still hold on the tradition and custom rooted in her indigenous culture. At the end of the story, the narrator states that she did not want her daughter in the future to have an arranged marriage with the fantasy of becoming the real jewel of the Land of Minang.